

SUBJECT: DREXEL HILL EC 135 INCIDENT JAN 11, 2022

My name is James Castronova and as requested, will provide a summary of the account related to you verbally on what transpired with regard to the Air Methods Evac Aircraft in the moments prior to its landing adjacent to the Methodist Church in Drexel Hill, PA.

At around 1 pm, I stepped out of the house to warm up our two vehicles as a cold snap had occurred the night before. As I approached the first vehicle, the sound of the aircraft approaching from the SW got my attention and piqued my interest due to several factors. I expected it to come overhead the house as the EMS aircraft inbound to Center City Medical Facilities do regularly. It did not. Instead of coming into view, it remained in the area just adjacent to our neighborhood and out of view, which seemed odd to me. Secondly, the fact that it was operating below the normal altitude I'm accustomed to seeing kept it from coming into view and after about 30 seconds, it occurred to me that the aircraft seemed to be loitering at a slower airspeed in the area proximal to where I was hearing it. All of this caused me to study the moment closer for explanation, leaving me wondering if the aircraft was going into the nearby High School Football field for a patient pick-up, which the Del County Hospital utilizes occasionally as a landing zone. That was quickly dismissed because the aircraft never came into view for its required high and low recons prior to landing.

As this was all unfolding, I realized that the aircraft was not operating normally because it was producing a low frequency "growly" sound and began listening more closely for additional queues as to just what was transpiring with the aircraft. I was able to determine that the engine and rotor were maintaining a steady state, with no audible changes regarding pitch or engine anomaly. This all transpired in roughly 45 seconds before the aircraft departed the area where I had been listening to it and began a turn away on a more southerly direction, quickly taking it out of earshot as it left. In the moments following this, it executed a forced landing in the street, roughly half a mile away.

Post crash, my phone started getting multiple texts within 15 minutes from former crewmembers at bases in MD and D.C. asking me if I'd heard about the EC135 crash in my township, Upper Darby. It was a HS moment... It was then it started becoming clearer to me just what had been going on and why and that the aircraft had indeed been in some kind of distress, explaining why it abruptly aborted its normal flight track into CHOP and was loitering in the flight profile and area I had established it was being flown; low and slow and noisy.

As I volunteered during our phone interview, I have considerable flight experience in the EC, flying it as a secondary a/c from 2004 to 2005 and as my primary from 2008 to 2016. I'm not overstating saying it sounded "off." I did offer an opinion because the engine and rotor sounded pretty healthy for the timeframe the aircraft was close and enough within earshot to make that assessment and I got a read simultaneously that the drivetrain was not. It occurred to me that's what I was hearing. This assessment comes from years of exposure to how the aircraft sounds in different flight profiles and what I am used to hearing vs. what I was hearing.